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# Tilburg Papers in Culture Studies

## Paper 54

### **Learning and teaching Chinese in the Netherlands: The metapragmatics of a polycentric language**

by

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***Learning and teaching Chinese in the Netherlands:  
The metapragmatics of a polycentric language***

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***Abstract***

This paper is concerned with the metapragmatics of Chinese as a polycentric language. Based on ethnographic observation and interview in and around a Chinese complementary school in the Netherlands, this paper describes an ongoing shift along with demographic, economic and political changes, in what counts as Chinese: a shift from Hong Kong and Taipei to Beijing as the most powerful centre of Chinese in the world. Migration makes communicative resources like language varieties globally mobile and this affects the normativity in the diaspora classroom. A clearer understanding of the metapragmatics of Chinese is useful because it provides a key to understanding social identities in contemporary Chinese migration contexts and to understanding language within contexts of superdiversity and globalisation.

[Key words: polycentricity, Chinese, Chinese diaspora, globalisation]

## **1 Introduction**

Mobility has become one of the key notions in the field of sociolinguistics (Blommaert, 2010; Blommaert and Rampton, 2011; Pennycook, 2012). In an ever more globalised world, the movements and migrations of people become increasingly important to understand their communicative practices. People move across spaces and bridge distances between spaces in their communication. These spaces are not empty but filled with norms, with conceptions of what counts as ‘proper’ and ‘normal’ language use and what does not count as such. The mobility of people therefore involves the mobility of linguistic and sociolinguistic resources. This mobility creates inequalities, overlaps and contrasts between languages as produced in different spaces. We find that such spaces are not equal or flat, but hierarchically ordered, and that language practices orient to one or more of such spaces as centers of communicative practice.

This paper focuses on Chinese in one of the oldest diasporas in Europe, the Netherlands. It examines the subtle ways of speaking about and referring to Chinese and explores the

implicit and more explicit meanings that are carried with it in metapragmatic discourses. We suggest that we need to consider Chinese as a polycentric language, i.e. as a language that operates on various scales and has multiple centers, and that these centers are unstable and shifting as a result of political and historical changes.

In what follows, first we shall look at the key theoretical notions and contextualize the notions against the linguistic backgrounds of China in relation to Chinese complementary schooling in the Netherlands. Second, in order for us to understand the ongoing processes of change within the Chinese community in the Netherlands, it is necessary to trace its historical, linguistic and demographic development. After that, we shall focus on empirical data collected in and around a Chinese complementary school in the city of Eindhoven, the Netherlands. The theoretical notions will be deployed in the paper for interpreting and analyzing the empirical data.

## **2 Theoretical framework: Metapragmatics, polycentricity and Chinese**

Metapragmatics as coined by Silverstein describes how the effects and conditions of language use themselves become objects of discourse (Silverstein, 1993). Metapragmatics has to do with meta-language, i.e. language about language. More precisely, it refers to the pragmatics, i.e. the meanings in use or the processes of social signification in praxis, that are applied in relation to varieties of language or ways of speaking, including accents, dialects/languages, etc.

Metapragmatics is thus concerned with the meanings or indexicalities that are attached to the use of a particular language variety. Such meanings may vary from (in-) appropriate, (un-) civilized, (un-) educated, (in-) authentic, (non-) standard, (ab-) normal, (im-) polite, (in-) correct, (im-) proper, right/wrong, good/bad, backward/modern, old/young, rude/elegant, beautiful/ugly, etc. Metapragmatic meanings are mappings of social categories on the basis of the language use of a particular individual or group. Often language use generates multiple and competing and partially overlapping meanings along several parameters. Someone's language may for instance be considered educated but inauthentic, or standard but too polite or old-fashioned for a particular context. Such meanings are applied to individuals' idiosyncratic ways of speaking, as in statements such as 'my English is a bit rusty' or 'she has a fake accent when she speaks dialect'; but often also to the types of language associated

with whole groups of speakers as in (*cliché*) statements such as ‘French is a romantic language’, ‘Japanese sounds aggressive’ or ‘dialect speakers are dumb’.

Polycentricity is used in various disciplines of the humanities and social sciences, including geography, political sciences and sociolinguistics. It refers to the multiplicity of centres of gravity (or centering forces) in social or spatial configurations. Whereas monocentric configurations are regulated according to a single reference point in space (and/or time) polycentric configurations are regulated by multiple, competing centers with unequal power.

Sociolinguistically, whether languages (in their nominal, countable form) are seen as species of ideolects with family resemblance (Mufwene, 2008), as artefacts created by linguists (Blommaert, 2008) or as historical constructs that emerged as by-products of nation-building projects (Makoni and Pennycook, 2007), they may be recognized to have a centre and periphery. The centre of a language is where speakers recognize that the language is ‘best’, ‘most correctly’ or ‘most normally’ spoken and often corresponds to the most populated middle class areas and to where the best or the highest number of educational institutions and publishers are or were established (think of Cambridge English, Florentine Italian, Île-de-France French, Randstad Dutch). The periphery of a language is where speakers (from the center) recognize the language is ‘hardest to understand’, ‘most corrupted’ or ‘least civilised’ and often corresponds to those areas with (historically) lower access to (higher) education and printed language.

To say that a language is polycentrically organized is to say that it has multiple, more or less powerful centers that compete with each other. These centers, may differ along the metapragmatic parameters that are considered. What may be the centre of educated speech or of ‘the standard’ language, is not necessarily (often not) also the center for authentic or cool speech; and what counts as center for such evaluative norms may change over time be replaced by other centers. Polycentricity is not entirely the same as pluricentricity as used by Clyne (1992) because the latter term emphasises plurality of varieties within a language, i.e. plurality of relatively stable self-contained linguistic systems that together make up a language. This is the case when ‘the German language’ is defined in terms of its German, Austrian and Swiss counterparts; or when ‘the English language’ is represented in terms of concentric circles consisting of a small number of native and a larger (growing) number of second and foreign language varieties. Polycentricity emphasizes the functional inequality between such varieties and the simultaneous links to the various centering powers language

practices are simultaneously subject to. Whereas a pluricentric language is the sum of its varieties, a polycentric language is a dynamic, socially ordered system of resources and norms that are strongly or weakly associated with one or more centers.

Although all languages are polycentrically organized, Chinese presents an extreme case of polycentricity. The Chinese language groups a higher number of people, a vaster geographical area and a larger continuum of variation beyond mutual intelligibility than any other language in the world, while at the same time upholding a meaningful sense of unity among its speakers, through a common writing system. For this reason, the Ethnologue (2009) recognises Chinese in their list of languages of China not as *a* language, but as a macrolanguage, i.e. ‘multiple, closely related individual languages that are deemed in some usage contexts to be a single language’. As a macrolanguage, Chinese has thirteen ‘member languages’, listed alphabetically as Gan, Hakka, Huizhou, Jinyu, Mandarin, Min Bei, Min Dong, Min Nan, Min Zhong, Pu-Xian, Wu, Xiang and Yue.

The official discourse in China, however, is that there is only *one Chinese language* that comprises variation in the form of many *fangyan* or dialects on the level of informal, spoken language. The Chinese language is unified by a homogeneous writing system that enables communication across a wide geographical area and among speakers of widely varying and mutually largely unintelligible vernaculars. This unification has a long and complex history, dating back to the third century BCE when Qinshihuang, the first Chinese emperor passed a series of major economic, political and cultural reforms, including the unification of the Chinese writing system. DeFrancis (1984) explained the situation of Chinese and its internal diversity, translating it to the European context with the hypothetical situation of the greater part of the European continent, from Italy to the Iberian peninsula and France with their many language varieties (Italian, French, Catalan, Corsican, etc.) would be united in single state and would have only Old Latin as a common language of literacy and of education, despite the differences and untelligibility that exists between the language varieties spoken in such places as Rome, Paris, Geneva, Barcelona and Milan.

In order for us to understand the changing polycentricity of Chinese in the Netherlands, it is necessary to trace the historical, linguistic and demographic development of the Chinese diaspora. After that, we shall focus on empirical data collected in and around a Chinese complementary school in the city of Eindhoven, the Netherlands.

### 3 China and the Chinese diaspora in the Netherlands

The Chinese are one of the oldest established immigrant communities in the Netherlands, and they form one of the largest overseas Chinese populations in continental Europe. In July 2011 the Chinese community celebrated its centennial: one hundred years of Chinese in the Netherlands (Wolf, 2011). The first Chinese immigrants were seamen from the southern part of China who settled in harbor cities like Rotterdam and Amsterdam where they built Chinatowns. Later, Chinese immigrants and their children spread all over the country. Figures of the number of Chinese residing in the Netherlands vary a lot depending on the source and on the definition of 'Chinese'. According to the Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics, there were around 78,500 Chinese, (i.e. persons who were born or one of whose parents were born in mainland China, Hong Kong) in the Netherlands in 2011. Among them, 51,000 are first generation. In official statistics third and subsequent generation migrants are invisible and are registered only in terms of citizenship and country of birth.

During the Mao Era (1949-1976), a series of reforms in the Chinese language were introduced in the People's Republic of China, including the introduction of a new, simplified Chinese writing system and a new romanisation system ('*pinyin*') – reforms that were not followed in Hong Kong and Taiwan (where traditional characters continued to be used). In this period, migration from and to, or foreign contact, including business, with the People's Republic was by and large impossible. The Chinese variety of the mainland, Mandarin or Putonghua, played only a marginal role in the Chinese diasporas until sometime after the Economic Reforms of 1978. Because migration from and contacts with Hong Kong (and Taiwan) remained possible all along this period, the Hong Kong Chinese, together with the earlier migrated Guangdong Chinese – both Cantonese-speaking – became the largest group of Chinese immigrants in the Netherlands. Together they represented some seventy percent of the Dutch Chinese around 1990 (CBS, 2010: 6). Consequently, Cantonese was the dominant language and lingua franca of the Dutch Chinese diaspora.

However, this has been changed since the 1990s because of the political and economic transformation in China in the last three decades. In the period of 1991-2000, immigration by people from mainland China, especially from Zhejiang province has increased dramatically to over 50 percent (CBS, 2010: 4). After 2000, more and more Chinese students have come to the Netherlands to study at Dutch universities and they have consequently become the second largest group of foreign students (after Germans) in the Netherlands. From this period

onwards, Chinese immigrants have originated from all over China. This increase of diversity in the Chinese diasporic population has meant a dramatic change of the status of Cantonese from the main language of the diaspora, to only one of the dialects. The Chinese variety of the north, Mandarin or *Putonghua* has steadily gained importance, both in China itself as well as in the diaspora.

After the turnover of Hong Kong and Macau to China, in 1997 and 1999 respectively, *Putonghua* became increasingly important there as well. In the course of the events recounted above, we are witnessing a language shift within a language, or the making of the world's biggest language. This account suggests how little languages as we identify them by their names are natural givens and how much languages are the result of political and historical contingencies and of strategic decisions and promotion campaigns designed to create national unity/identity or to boost national economies.

In short, the current flow of Chinese migration to the Netherlands is multi-layered and highly diverse in terms of the place of their origin, individual motivations and personal or family trajectories. The demographic changes in the constitution of Chinese diaspora and their linguistic changes have far-reaching consequences for people's language and identity repertoires.

#### **4 A Chinese Complementary School in the Netherlands**

Many young persons of Chinese heritage attend Chinese language schools on weekends. Most of these so-called 'complementary schools' gather on Saturday mornings, often on the premises of mainstream schools. They are community-run schools operating outside of the mainstream education system and offering a community-specific curriculum complementary to the mainstream educational contents (see Blackledge and Creese, 2010 for a discussion).

The first officially registered Chinese school in The Netherlands was established in the late 1970s. At the moment of our research (2010-2011), in all major cities in the Netherlands there was at least one Chinese school offering complementary education in Chinese language and culture for children with Chinese parents. The *Stichting Chinees Onderwijs Nederland* [Foundation Chinese Education The Netherlands] lists more than forty schools ([www.chineesonderwijs.nl](http://www.chineesonderwijs.nl), accessed March 2013).



The research reported here takes place primarily in a Chinese complementary school in Eindhoven in the Dutch province of North Brabant. The school is one of the oldest official registered Chinese schools in The Netherlands, initially established in 1978 by the Chinese Protestant Church of Eindhoven. It originally provided Cantonese lessons to children of Cantonese origin in a café-restaurant. There were only about twenty students at the time. With the changing composition of Chinese immigrants in The Netherlands and the geopolitical repositioning of PRC in the globalized world system, lessons have gradually shifted from Cantonese to Mandarin in the last decade. And since 2006, there have been only Mandarin classes left.

At the time of our research, the school had around 280 students, and like many other Chinese community schools, the Chinese school in Eindhoven rents classrooms from a Dutch mainstream secondary school (for four hours per week). This happens on Saturdays when students and teachers are free from their daily education and/or work, and when the school premises are available for rent. Classes in the Chinese school run from 9.15 to 11.45 in the morning and include a 20 minute break, during which there are regular staff meetings for the teachers. The school has classes starting from kindergarten and progressing to level 1 through level 12. The lower grades typically have up to twenty pupils whereas the higher grades usually have less than eight pupils. In addition, there are four levels of adult language classes on offer to non-Chinese speakers who wish to learn Chinese. There is also a Dutch class for people of Chinese origin that is attended, among others, by teachers that are not yet proficient in Dutch.

Students in the school are mainly from the area of Eindhoven, but some students also travel considerable distances to attend the school, including those who come from towns across the border in Belgium. Altogether there are 25 teachers, including teachers for calligraphy, music and Kong Fu. Many of the teachers are long-term residents in the local area. Both teachers and students at the HT School come from a wide range of social and linguistic backgrounds. Some of the teachers are well-paid professionals working at the High Tech Campus or for one of the hospitals in the city. Others are housewives or househusbands or they work in the catering business, exploiting or working for a Chinese restaurant. Yet others are researchers or doctoral students who have recently arrived in the Netherlands from Mainland China. Recruitment of teachers is mainly from the community through personal introductions, or through the school website. Student recruitment, likewise, is through word of mouth, the website, and advertisements in local Chinese supermarkets and restaurants.

Since the classes have gradually changed to Mandarin, the school no longer uses textbooks prepared in Hong Kong but by Ji Nan University (暨南大学) on the Mainland. The textbooks that are donated by the Chinese embassy in the Netherlands, are written especially for ‘overseas Chinese’ and were originally targeted at overseas Chinese children in the United States and Canada. Therefore, the language of instruction in the textbooks used is English. Teachers often speak English in addition to, or sometimes instead of Dutch, and *flexibly* switch in and out of Chinese, Dutch and/or English in the classroom.

## **5 Methodology**

We adopted a linguistic ethnographic perspective in our study of discourses of Chinese identity and inheritance among young people. Our fieldwork started from the institutional context of the Chinese language and culture classroom at the Chinese school Eindhoven, but we also see the school as deeply situated in a wider context, and as a non-autonomous sociolinguistic space, anchored in the wider Chinese community of Eindhoven. Thus we move from what happens inside the classroom to what happens outside the classrooms and outside of the school, involving e.g. observations in both on- and offline Chinese communities (Qingfeng tea-room, Chinese restaurants and other organized community celebrations and activities such as tai qi and ping pong as well as in online social network sites (e.g., the Asian and proud forum on Hyves). The ethnographic perspective thus includes on the one hand the ‘traditional’ objects of ethnography (sound recordings, observation of situated events, interviews), but it adds to this two other dimensions: attention to visibility in the field of language; and attention to macro-sociolinguistic aspects influencing and constraining micro-events.

Before entering the field as researcher, the first author was a teacher in the Eindhoven Chinese school giving a practical course of Chinese as a foreign language for Dutch adults. Access to the ‘Chinese school’ was therefore not problematic. After four years’ of involvement as a teacher and as first-generation migrant herself, the first author was regarded a member of the teaching staff and a member of the Chinese community more generally. As an outsider to this community and only working part-time on this project, the second author had a secondary role in the ethnographic fieldwork and joined only some of the weekly visits. Our observations followed the school year and spanned the period between April 2010 and

June 2011. During this time we regularly observed classroom practices, staff meetings and breaks in the school context and had many conversations with teachers, students, administrators and parents about complementary school life, diasporic identity, China, and Chinese language teaching in the Netherlands.

## **6. The metapragmatics of sociolinguistic transformation**

The first extract we discuss is based on an observation in May 2010 in Mr. Zhou's combined grade 11/12 class. Nine students aged 16 to 19 had officially registered in Zhou's class. The actual number of students attending his class, however, fluctuated considerably. At the moment of our observation there were only four students, all female. According to Mr Zhou, the low attendance was due to the fact that it was exam weeks in the mainstream schools.

Zhou's class is ethnolinguistically very heterogeneous. Two of the students present, Esther and Hil Wah, were of Hong Kong Cantonese background, one, Wendy, of Wenzhounese background, and Tongtong had a mixed Guangdong and Hongkong background. According to Zhou, there were also students from Fujianese and Malaysian Chinese backgrounds. Seven of the nine students attended mainstream Dutch medium school, the two Malaysian students attended an English-medium international school from Monday to Friday. Six of the students in Zhou's class were born in the Netherlands, and the remaining three in mainland China and Malaysia.

Mr Zhou is an earlier migrant from Guangdong province and is a speaker of Cantonese. The day when Zhou and the researcher (Li) arrived in the classroom, he greeted and chatted with the students in Cantonese. When the lesson started, Zhou switched from Cantonese to Mandarin as the language of instruction. During the lesson, Zhou and the students were practicing synonyms in the HSK exam exercise for level 5. The HSK test is the Chinese equivalent of the TOEFL and IELTS tests for English. It is a Chinese language proficiency test designed and developed by the HSK (*Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi*) Center of Beijing Language and Culture University to assess the Chinese proficiency of non-native speaking foreigners and overseas Chinese. HSK has in total six levels ranging from elementary level 1 to advanced level 6. What is interesting is that the term for Chinese in the name of the test is Hanyu (汉语) – the language of the Han, the majority nationality (zu, 族) in China. In practice this means Putonghua.

The classroom was organized in rows. All four students sat in the middle row. Wendy and Hil Wah were in the middle of the first row in the classroom with Esther and Tongtong sitting in the row behind them. There was a whiteboard in front of the classroom and the teacher sat between the whiteboard and the students. The researcher took position in the back of the classroom, making notes and video recordings at selected moments while audio recording the entire lesson. The lesson started with vocabulary training of what is known in the HSK exercise book as *tong yi ci* 同义词 ‘synonyms’ Extract 1 below is taken from the beginning of the lesson.

*Extract 1: Tongtong correcting Mr Zhou’s accent (classroom observation, May 2010)*

		Original in Chinese/Dutch	Translation in English
1	Mr Zhou	你们造句也行，把荷兰文的意思说出来也行，就过了。‘本质’ [běn zhí]	You can make sentences or say the meaning in Dutch: ‘Quality/nature’ [běn zhí].
12	Tongtong	本质 [běn zhí]？某某东西的本质 [běn zhí] <i>eigenschap van</i> ×××?	Quality/nature? Something’s nature? nature of ×××?
3	Mr Zhou	Eigenschap。	Quality/nature.
4	Tongtong	不是本质 [běn zhì] 吗？	Should it not be [běn zhì?] (with falling tone)
5	Mr Zhou	((looks at the book again)) 本质啊，应该读第四声啊，对不起。	Běn zhì ah, should be pronounced with the fourth tone <i>ah</i> , sorry.
6	Mr Zhou	下一个，‘比较’ [bǐ jiǎo]。	The next one, ‘comparing’ [bǐ jiǎo]
7	Tongtong	比较 [bǐ jiǎo]? 比较 [bǐ jiào] 嘛？	Bǐ jiǎo? Should it not be bǐ jiào?
8	Class	((all four students correcting his pronunciation))	
9	Mr Zhou	((nods in agreement, repeats the corrected pronunciation)) 比较啊，也读错了。	bǐ jiào <i>ah</i> . I made again a mistake.
10	Class	((students look at each other and laugh))	

Let us first take a look at what is happening here. The class was one month before the HSK exam. Mr Zhou’s assignment was to let the students practice synonyms. To achieve this, Zhou asked the students to make sentences with difficult words in Chinese or translate these words into Dutch. The students did not, however, just do the assignment by making sentences in Chinese or translating the words in Dutch but immediately turned the exercise into

pronunciation training for the teacher. In line 4, Tongtong corrected Mr Zhou pronunciation of *bǐ jiǎo*. In line 5, Mr Zhou agreed with Tongtong that he had made a mistake. In line 7, Tongtong corrected Mr Zhou's pronunciation again and in line 8, all the four students corrected Mr Zhou's pronunciation. Mr Zhou kindly agreed with the students and admitted in line 9 that he had made yet another mistake. The extract ends with the students looking at each other and laughing at the situation and/or the teacher.

When we take a close look at the transcript, we see abundant features of non-nativeness in Mr Zhou's speech. The classroom episode presents a serious deviation from the traditional Chinese language class where the teacher has all the 'knowledge' and is assumed to be a model language user, with respect to vocabulary, grammar, orthography and also pronunciation. However, in this classroom, we see another scenario. The language teacher's pronunciation is corrected by his students. From a traditional educational point of view, one might raise doubts about Mr Zhou's qualification as a teacher of Chinese. Is he a qualified language teacher?

In order to answer this question, from a sociolinguistic point of view, we need to look at what happens outside the classroom. Schools as institutions are non-autonomous sociolinguistic spaces and are deeply situated in a wider societal context. Chinese heritage schools are situated at the intersection of two or more different political, social, economic, linguistic and sociological systems or regimes. Our analysis sets out from a sociolinguistic perspective that involves different scale-levels. Different scales organize different patterns of normativity (Blommaert, 2005; Collins and Slembrouck, 2006; Collins, 2009). The analysis of our classroom interaction requires a processual epistemology in which the classroom interactions at one level of social structure need to be understood in relation to phenomena from another level of social structure. Time and space are the two key concepts in understanding of what is happening here.

For a long time, Cantonese was taught at Chinese school overseas. Mr Zhou is a first generation migrant of Cantonese background, who started his voluntary teaching career as a Chinese language teacher teaching Cantonese but had to reeducate himself to teach Mandarin. His reeducation is self-taught, but also partly taken care of by his students as could be seen in Extract 1 above.

The point here is not about the pronunciation of *ben zhi*, but to document the emergent and problem-ridden transition from one language regime to another. This little classroom episode reveals big demographic and geopolitical changes of global Chineseness –

i.e., changes in spatial configurations: (1) the language teacher becomes a language learner; (2) the school surrenders the old language regime to capture a (new) audience; (3) the traces of worldwide migration flows impact on the specific demographic, social and cultural dynamics of the Chinese presence in Eindhoven; (4) the Chinese philosophy of cultural, political and sociolinguistic ‘harmony’ is not strongly enforced in the diaspora, but is brought in – with force – by new immigrants from the PRC; and (5) on the whole we witness a geopolitical repositioning of China: the emergence of PRC as new economic world power.

This classroom episode triggered an interview with Tongtong’s parents. The meeting took place at the restaurant of Tong tong’s parents on a Saturday evening. The restaurant is located next to a supermarket, under a residential apartment in the north of Eindhoven. The name of the restaurant is written in Dutch (*Chinees-Indisch Restaurant*), traditional Chinese characters (富貴酒樓 ‘prosperous’) and Cantonese romanisation (*fu kwei*). The linguistic landscape of Chinese communities and the role of restaurants deserve a separate paper. This kind of Chinese restaurant is a typical Chinese restaurant in the Netherlands: established in the 1960-70s and serving Chinese-Indonesian (*Chinees-Indisch*) cuisine. The restaurant was a family business. For 20 years, the restaurant has been owned by Tongtong’s parents, who inherited it from Tongtong’s paternal grandparents.

Extract 2 is taken from a one hour interview with Tongtong’s mother in Tongtong’s presence. The interview was an informal, although audio-recorded conversation about the family’s migration history and their language use. In the extract, we can read the researcher inquire about the family’s language policy.

*Extract 2: Interview with Tongtong’s mother about family’s language policy*

	Original in Chinese (Mandarin)	Translation in English
1 JLi	听彤彤她说她小时候在家是说广东话，看广东话电视，后来你把广东话的电视频道删了？只让她看普通话电视节目？	I heard from Tongtong that she watched Cantonese channels at home when she was small, but later you deleted all the Cantonese channels and let Tongtong watch only Putonghua channels?
2 TM	是，因为我是在国内受的教育。我们国内都是讲普通话教学的嘛。来这里我就觉得奇怪，为什么要广东话教学。不过我们家都是讲广东话的，我们是广东人嘛，当然在家是讲方言啦。	Yes, because I was educated in China. In China, we all know about Putonghua teaching. When I came here, I felt it was very strange that Cantonese was taught at school. But at home, we speak Cantonese. We are Cantonese; of course at home we speak dialect.
3 JLi	方言？你是指广东话？	Dialect? You mean Cantonese?

4	TM	是，我们的方言是广东话。后来，后来中文学校我要求要那个普通话教学，要开普通话班，那时没有，那是14，15年前，彤彤，她5岁左右。后来读了两年小学幼稚园的课程，后来就有了(普通话班)，我就赶快给她转，她那时还哭。因为都是小朋友，都在一起玩，就把她一个人捋出来，到另外一个班上，她那时不适应，她不肯走，哎呀，连哄带骗的。	Yes, our dialect is Cantonese. Then, then in the Chinese school I asked for Putonghua teaching, Putonghua class, but they didn't have. That was about 14 or 15 years ago, when Tongtong was about 5 years old. She started two years of Cantonese kindergarten class, and then there came the Putonghua class, so I immediately sent her there. She cried, because she had made friends in the class and didn't want to go to another one. I had to sweet-talk her into Putonghua class.
5	JLi	那是第一个普通话班？九几年的时候？	Was it the first Putonghua class? When did that happen?
6	TM	我估计她那时候7岁左右，99年的时候。	When she was about 7 years old, around 1999.
7	JLi	你是什么时候来荷兰的？	When did you move to the Netherlands?
8	TM	我二十多年前的荷兰，80年代末。	More than twenty years ago, in the late 1980s.
9	JLi	你来荷兰前生活在广东？在广东也是说粤语的，但是你还是觉得普通话很重要？	You were living in Guangdong before you came to the Netherlands? Cantonese is spoken in Guangdong. Do you think that Putonghua is very important?
10	TM	是的，因为你要是中国跟其它省份联系，这是必须的桥梁来着。	Yes, if you want to communicate with people from other provinces in China. Putonghua is the bridge to enable that.

Tongtong's behaviour in the classroom (her correcting of the teacher's accent) needs to be understood against the background of the decision made by Tongtong's mother to transfer Tongtong from a Cantonese class to a Mandarin class as soon as this was possible in Eindhoven. This extract gives insight into Tongtong's 'family language policy' (see Curdt-Christiansen, 2013 for an introduction) as well as the macro political transformation at the highest scale-level. This is most clearly articulated by Tongtong's mother in line 10: Putonghua is a bridge to enable communication in a broader network of Chinese migrants. This rescaling of the community (from a local Guangdongese language community to a translocal or global Chinese community) is necessitated by the new waves of Chinese mobility from the PRC, causing a diversification of 'Chineses' and Chineseness.

This diversification of Chinese diasporas across the world is a result of political and economic changes in China over the last three decades. The language ideological effects of this geopolitical transformation can be read in Extract 2. For people who are educated in China such as Tongtong's mother, being educated is equal to speaking Putonghua. We read this quite literally in line 2 and 4. Tongtong's mother found it strange that Cantonese was

taught at Chinese schools in the Netherlands, because for her, Cantonese is not a language, but a dialect. Tongtong's mother, who has been educated in China and has worked as an editor at a television station in Guangzhou before her emigration in the late 1980s, stresses the importance of speaking Putonghua for educational and general success in life. This ideology is shared with the majority of new migrants from the PRC, especially the university educated elite of *liuxuesheng* (Chinese international students). This brings us to extract 3, an interview with a former teacher of the school, who was educated in Guangdong. The interview is conducted in 2011. Jessie migrated to the Netherlands in the late 1990s to study and a voluntary teacher at the school from 1999 to 2003.

*Extract 3: Interview with former teacher Jessie*

1.	JLi	你以前在安多分的中文学校教过书？	You had been teaching Chinese in the Chinese school in Eindhoven?
2.	Jessie	教过，教粤语，教过 4 年。从 99 年开始。	Yes, I taught Cantonese for 4 years since 1999.
3.	JLi	那时中文学校粤语班多吗？	Were there many Cantonese classes?
4.	Jessie	有好几个，学校都是以说粤语为主。	Quite a few. Cantonese was the dominant language in the school.
5.	JLi	现在中文学校都没有粤语班了，都是普通话班。	There is no Cantonese class anymore in the Chinese school.
6.	Jessie	就是，早就该没粤语了。	Yes, should have done that earlier.
7.	JLi	Hmmm	Hmmm
8.	Jessie	知道吗，我那时候教得很痛苦。书是繁体字，教简体字。	You know, it was very painful for me to teach at that time, because the textbooks were in traditional characters but you had to teach the children simplified character writing.
9.	JLi	怎么有这种？	How come ?
10.	Jessie	因为当时也可以教繁体字，但有些班里学生家长的意见，他们觉得简体字比繁体字有用。当时我们的课本都是台湾提供的，没有简体字的课本。	Because some parents requested for simplified character teaching, they thought it was more useful. But our textbooks were provided by the Taiwanese government, so they had no simplified characters.



11.	JLi	所以当时中文学校的课本都是台湾提供的。	So the teaching materials were provided by Taiwan at the time.
12.	Jessie	是，以前我们都是 10 月 10 号台湾的国庆节，我们都是去台湾的大使馆吃饭。有很多这样的活动。	Yes, We also celebrated the Taiwanese national day on the 10th of October by going to the Taiwanese embassy to have a meal there.
13.	JLi	这些年的变化很大。	Things have changed in the last decade.
14.	Jessie	是，我们以前教的都是广东，香港移民的孩子。现在都是大陆那边的。我以前没有接触香港那边的教材，其实台湾那边的教材用广东话教是教不出来的。有些国语的音用广东话教是教不出来的。所以教得很痛苦，用的是台湾的教材，教的是粤语的发音，写得是简体字。	Yes, my students were all Guangdong and Hong Kong origin. But now the students are from all over China. I didn't have experience with the textbooks provided by Hong Kong. What I experienced is the teaching material provided by Taiwan couldn't be used to teach Cantonese, because some pronunciations in these textbooks couldn't be pronounced in Cantonese. For instance, rhymes in the Mandarin poetry don't have the same effect in Cantonese. So it was very painful for me to teach Cantonese pronunciation while using the Taiwanese textbooks and teaching simplified character writing at the time.

In the interview, Jessie describes her experience of teaching Chinese, the demographic composition of the students, and the teaching materials that the school used. In her teaching, she confronted with the strong ‘polycentricity’ of Chinese: Cantonese had to be taught using Taiwanese textbooks, raising linguistic and literacy issues that she found hard to manoeuvre, the more since the parents demanded the teaching of simplified script to their children.

Intuitively, many people see the school teacher as the all-knowing repository and mediator of knowledge, as a stable figure whose input would always be directed towards the focus of the class activities and the curriculum knowledge he or she is supposed to transfer. In the context of our research, however, we came to see the teachers as a highly heterogeneous, ‘unstable’ group of people. The reason for this is twofold. First, the teachers themselves have a complex repertoire and a complex sociolinguistic biography, involving sometimes dramatic and traumatizing language shift during certain phases of their lives. As a consequence, language teachers themselves are, in actual fact, language learners. The second reason is that teachers from the PRC often arrive with a teaching style and a set of language-ideological assumptions that are at odds with those of the learners in the diaspora. This

potentially results in mutual frustration and in incidents over class activities and interpretations of tasks.

Jessie's teaching experience dated to a decade ago, probably the very early stage of the process of language shift to Putonghua we currently see in full force. These observations show the fundamental aspects about language in the current globalised world. Chinese, or any language for that matter, is not a fixed object or entity that people can learn to make use of but is dynamic, changing, contested, in transformation. Languages are moving targets. Chinese as a language has a long history of export and mobility, of being exported 'to the world' by Chinese migrants from the late 19th Century until today. This has resulted in divergent configurations of language diversity overseas and at home, that are converging in the current wave of globalization characterized as superdiversity (cf. Blommaert and Rampton, 2011). If we understand current globalization processes as the compression of time and space through increased flows of people, goods and images – migration, (mass) communication, imagination – facilitated through technologies, then we can understand how developments in the diaspora are reflecting in intricate ways developments in the PRC. Researching Chinese language in the diaspora helps us look at 'the world as one large, interactive system, composed of many complex subsystems' (Appadurai, 1996: 41) and at processes that are of a larger scale than nations and states.

## **7. Conclusions**

We began this paper by suggesting that we need to consider Chinese as a polycentric language in the context of migration and globalisation. Drawing on Silverstein's notion of metapragmatics, we have examined the specific Chinese diasporic context, namely the educational context of the Chinese complementary school in the Netherlands, through which this paper has demonstrated an ongoing shift along with demographic, economic and political changes, in what counts as Chinese: a shift from Hong Kong and Taipei to Beijing as the most powerful reference centre of Chinese in the world.

These ongoing language shifts in the Chinese diaspora reflect a series of language political changes in China and have to do with what Dong (2010) has called 'the enregisterment of Putonghua in practice', the processes in which Chinese is becoming an exclusive, monoglot, homogeneous entity that erases the diversity existing underneath it, the process that makes Chinese synonymous with Putonghua in an increasing number of contexts.

Consequently, speakers in the diaspora such as Mr. Zhou, Tongtong and her mother, and Jessie have adjusted or are adjusting or catching up with this changing situation. Chinese language learning and teaching take place on shifting ground: the main foci of orientation – the normative ‘centers’ of language learning and teaching – are shifting and changing rapidly and intensely. The object of learning and teaching in this heterogeneous, polycentric community and the identities that emerge in the process are moving targets.

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### **Transcription conventions**

- ××× : inaudible word(s)
- (( )) : the transcriber’s comments
- italics : Dutch
- [ ] : pinyin with tone indication

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